

## if you never shoot, you'll never know by freshbloom

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**Summary:**

**prompt:** "babe, you look so cool."

lucas and max prepare for the battle ahead.

## **if you never shoot, you'll never know**

Lucas had always differed from the Party. At times, he wasn't sure how he'd manage to befriend them all in the first place. He isn't like Mike, impulsive and emotional, ready to act on his feelings before his brain had properly registered them. He isn't like Dustin, overly sentimental and a little loud, constantly formulating some sort of plan. And he isn't like Will either, quiet and calculating, gentle, but braver than all of them by far. He isn't like El, but he doesn't think anyone ever could be. Powers aside, El paraded a strength that none of them could possibly match. The world seemed only to offer her cruelty, and in return, she constantly had some measure of kindness to give back. So no, he isn't like El, but he doesn't mind that as much. She deserves, after everything, to occupy her own space, untouched and unparalleled by anyone else.

He definitely isn't like Max. She's impulsive too, a little angry at times, but kindest to the people that count. Max had always been, and will always be, unabashed in her actions. And though she was often just as terrified as the rest of them, she seemed to care little for fear, for anything that threatened to stand in the way of her friends and her happiness. The world could collapse in on itself a thousand times over and Max would rebuild it, no matter the struggle.

Lucas is none of those things. He's logical, meticulous, careful. Daring only in times of real desperation, and even then, daring is concrete, daring is planned and considered with a somewhat tangible end goal.

But watching as she rummages through his drawers, most likely searching for his face paint, Lucas wants to throw all that away in a sudden flood of emotion. This moment could be normal, in a life to come, one where she is not searching his room for battle supplies but something more mundane. In an even farther life, this scene could materialize in a room that belongs to both of them. And he wants to be able to exist in those lives with her, so desperately, he has to stop himself from giving up, from locking his bedroom door and hiding with her until the world rights itself again. And when they do leave, he'll have to stop himself from coddling her. She can protect herself, he knows that, hell— she's stronger than he might ever be. But he'd do

anything to bring her some peace, to make sure she survives in the end. He'd die, if he has to.

But he's scared that one of these days he'll find no difference between himself and the monsters they all so desperately try to defeat, and then, he won't just be willing to die for her, but he'll be willing to kill for her, too. He's scared that it will happen to all of them, the way it has to Will and El. And he hates himself just a little for thinking it, because he sees the pain those two carry around with them, but fuck—maybe it's fear, or maybe it's just Max, that's convincing him this is what it means to care for someone, at least it's become so, somewhere along the way. He'd heard once that love meant putting someone else's needs above your own. He's not sure how true that is, or maybe how healthy, but seeing her now, carefully applying two streaks of black paint to her cheeks, he thinks it makes sense in a way. And though he never wants love to corrupt him, the self-loathing might be worth it if only to see her like this always, hair and eyes blazing in the dim light of his bedroom, a sense of bravery to her movements so powerful it seems almost to be radiating off her in waves. It both scares him and comforts him to know that she would live with the hatred, too. But Lucas stops—reminds himself that these things won't happen unless he lets them. He won't ruin himself, and he won't let her do the same.

She's putting on a bandanna now (his favourite one, but he doesn't mind), and something about her appearance makes him feel as though he's staring at everything and nothing— all at once. Like the Earth isn't just a planet, it's Max Mayfield, both brave and afraid in the fading light of day and moving comfortably around his room. She looks like everything he could ever want.

"Babe," He says, stepping towards her, "You look so cool." She turns and looks at him.

"Like, totally tubular." Except he's not smiling, and neither is she. And something dies in that room then. Not so much between them, but around them. It takes the sentiment out of this whole routine, turns the mirage of bravery into something childish, and they're children, but they're not, not anymore. He registers, for just a moment, that it might be innocence that's been ripped from the air, sudden and inevitable and painless; he forgets ever carrying it around

with him at all.

*(Except when he looks at her. Then, he's 14, breathing in the crisp October air, parading around Loch Nora and using cheesy skater slang, hands sticky with Halloween candy. Max has a way of reminding him what it means to forget, to be oblivious and at peace with the world again. Lately, he only ever feels withdrawn from this place, from the whole universe. But then their eyes meet and they somehow become the universe, the two of them, and it's far too easy to love the world when it's reduced to a measure of him and her.)*

She looks away and squeezes her eyes shut, almost as though she's trying to center herself. The expression holds for a little while before she takes a deep breath and looks at him again, and there's a resolve to her that hadn't been there before. And for just a second, Lucas can't find the 15-year-old girl in her eyes, the one he knows he's looking at. He can't find the 15-year-old in himself, either. But then she's smiling, and they're young again. Kids, adorned in camo bandanas and haphazard streaks of black paint, firm in their belief that these things are enough to save them.

"Don't get all sentimental on me now, Stalker." She says, grabbing his hand. She squeezes lightly, and Lucas knows she's telling him they'll have plenty of time to revisit the things which brought them together, now isn't the time for nostalgic parallels— now isn't goodbye.

The world outside is hours, maybe minutes away from collapsing, but in a bedroom in Hawkins, Indiana, Lucas and Max are only beginning, their fate sealed in the Star Wars memorabilia and nerdy action figures surrounding them. For once, his logic is in perfect harmony with her impulsiveness, because the two of them both know, with more certainty than they have ever known anything, that they don't end. They last, by whatever means.

He leans in and kisses her. It's only brief, and slightly awkward, giving he moves in a little too fast and ends up kissing the side of her mouth more than anything, but he feels far braver, and she's grinning when he pulls away, anyway. He squeezes her hand one last time, before reaching down and grabbing his backpack, packed with a measly supply of rocks for his slingshot, and his binoculars.

“Okay, I’m ready.” Lucas says, straightening back up. Max nods, a strange mix of excitement and fear written in her expression. She grabs her own bag, latches onto his hand again, and looks at him.

“Let’s end this shit.”

### **Author’s Note:**

like i said in the tags, i actually wrote this months ago but never posted it (until now). there's no real plot fhfhfh but i sorta like how it turned out?? idk, i feel like lumax deserves some more emotional moments. anyway, im just trying to get all my fics in one place.

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until next time (when i post a fic that's actually new)

<3